



STRATEGY, EXECUTION, SUCCESS

ENVISION BRYANT 2030 COMMUNITY MEETING SUMMARY REPORT

**THE CITY OF
BRYANT**
THE HONORABLE JILL DABBS

BUILDING & EMPOWERING ARKANSAS COMMUNITIES

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BRYANT, ARKANSAS

HELPING YOU BUILD A SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY

OVERVIEW

Legacy Consulting conducted a series of community meetings in Bryant, Arkansas as a part of the Envision Bryant 2030 community planning process. There were four meetings each focused on a different aspect of the community. The topics included public safety, quality of life, public works, and community image.

The meetings were focused on giving citizens the opportunity to have the Mayor and members of the Bryant City Council hear their voices on a wide variety of issues relating to the future development of the city.

Bryantonians are very engaged in their community. Each meeting was well attended despite poor weather and competition from Razorback games and other local events. During the meetings citizens heard from a panel of experts who gave updates and answered audience questions about the issue of focus for that specific meeting. The citizens of Bryant are not shy about sharing their vision for their community or having their concerns addressed. The active engagement of the community members who were present contributed greatly to the value of the ideas which came from each meeting.

In addition to the citizen comments and suggestions garnered during the meetings this report also contains citizen feedback from the City of Bryant Assessment Questionnaire which was distributed to citizens via the internet in correlation with the community meetings, and citizen responses to the live Atext surveys which were deployed during several of the meetings.

The report begins with our observations. The next section encapsulates the citizen feedback. Following that section are our recommendations.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Bryant is a rapidly growing community that has much to offer its citizens, and tremendous potential for continued growth. Bryant's population has grown nearly 100% since the year 2000. This rapid and exponential growth has brought many benefits such as increased school funding, new business growth, and additional local tax revenue. This growth has also brought the challenges that come with rapid growth. One of those challenges is the competing ideas for what Bryant's community image is. Should Bryant always be just a small bedroom community? Should Bryant continue to grow into a large urban community? How does the city plan for and accommodate this growth? These are some of the primary questions this report seeks to answer.

OUR OBSERVATIONS

Bryant Arkansas is a community that is primed to reach new heights. Bryant has all of the tools necessary to be a key player in Arkansas from an economic and community development prospective for years to come.

As is well known by city leaders, Bryant has many of the key resources large firms and site consultants are looking for when evaluating potential sites for expansion. Bryant sits on a major four lane interstate, and has an airport suitable for corporate jets. The community is clean. It is home to great people who have a strong sense of community. Bryant has a low crime rate, and offers good quality of life. One of the key benefits Bryant has to offer prospective families is a phenomenal school, and beautiful Bishop Park.

Areas of Need

While much can be said about what Bryant is doing right there are some areas of need that should be addressed.

There Is No Town Center

When one thinks of majestic Arkansas communities the list begins with those that offer true downtowns. Communities such as El Dorado, Eureka Springs, and Hot Springs come to mind. For most Arkansans when we think of home our thoughts turn to the downtown in our community. Bryant has no downtown. As was noted several times in the comments from the town hall meetings this is something that your citizens want addressed. While, this is no easy task, it can be done.

A town center can be a point of pride and a “central” meeting place or focal point of the community. Without a true town center Bryant will always feel like a place that just has something missing.

Unity Amongst Elected Officials

There is a well-known divide between the mayor and certain members of the city council. Public feuds are divisive and distracting if not destructive to true progress. We do not suggest that city leaders have to agree on every issue facing the city. Rather, we suggest that leaders of great communities take a “worthy opponent” attitude which leads them to limit their debates to legitimate issues without making personal attacks, or creating an atmosphere of tension. Corporate decision makers are unlikely to invest millions of dollars into a community when it appears that the elected officials are more interested in tearing each other down than building the community up. In the age of Google these disputes do not remain local matters. The city leadership must work together to lead Bryant into the future it deserves.

Connectivity is A Major Challenge

Many of the attendees of the town hall meetings communicated their frustration with traffic flows in Bryant. Traveling the main arteries during rush hour and other peak traffic times is a challenge for many citizens.

Based upon our experience lack of connectivity is often the result of poor planning. However, that is not the case in Bryant. No one could have predicted that Bryant would have the exponential growth it experienced. Furthermore, the interstate cuts Bryant in half. As Bryant looks ahead it must invest significantly in improving street connectivity.

Bryant is Not Pedestrian Friendly

This issue relates to the lack of connectivity. Bryant is not a very walkable community. Several residents communicated a vision for Bryant in which it grows in size while maintaining the small town feel that draws people in. When one thinks of a community that vision includes kids walking to school, and cars sharing the streets with families walking their dogs and people bicycling. There are many grants available to help in this effort.

Being a Bedroom Community Makes it Difficult to Build Community

Currently 75 percent of the citizens of Saline County work elsewhere. When a city is made up primarily of people who spend the majority of their waking hours working elsewhere and commuting back and forth, it is challenging to create an environment that feels like a community. Bryant has done a good job meeting this challenge by establishing community focal points such as the fabulous facility at Bishop Park. As Bryant looks ahead it must continue to develop areas and create programs that allow its transient workforce to make a stronger connection with the greater community.

Diversify the Bryant Economy

As stated in the community feedback captured below Bryant's citizens want more diverse employment options. While Bryant should not seek to become Little Rock, it should invest time and energy into recruiting Fortune 500 company assets such as call centers and regional headquarters. When citizens spend their days out of town, they also spend their money out of town. A side effect of so much commuting is the leakage of restaurant, grocery and other sales, along with the tax dollars that go with them.

A True Economic Development Organization

A Google search for doing business in Bryant does not result in a singular point of contact for a corporation or site consultant looking for information on the community. The local chamber does have a web page that provides helpful information. However, none of the searches produced the name of an actual human being to contact if a party is interested in Bryant. While, Bryant does participate

in the SCEDC, and regionalism is an important economic development tactic, it is important that Bryant have its own economic concept dedicated solely to doing what is best for Bryant.

More Retail and Dining Diversity

Another area that garnered lots of discussion during the town hall meeting was the lack of full service restaurants in Bryant. Additionally, the citizens want more retail shopping choices such as a book store or Whole Foods store. The citizens would also like to see a movie theater in Bryant.

No Significant Hospital Presence

Currently Bryant does not have a hospital. The lack of quality medical care can discourage large firms from relocating to Bryant. While it would not be financially feasible for Bryant to establish its own hospital the city should look at alternatives to enhance the healthcare options for its citizens.

CITIZEN AREAS OF PRAISE

The citizens had lots of high praise for their city government in a wide variety of areas. These are some of the highlights broken out by topic. We captured the spirit of each comment. In some instances we had to paraphrase in order to save space. Direct quotes are in quotation marks. We did not record duplicate comments in this report. Additionally, some of the feedback came from the Atext on-site survey tool we used to survey participants at the meetings. This section also includes comments from the web based survey that was a companion to the meetings and was posted online for citizens who could not come to the meetings. Atext survey results are noted “Atext,” and web survey results are denoted by the term “Web.”

Public Safety

- Great that the city has transformed an all-volunteer fire department into a professional organization.
- Excellent response time for the fire department and EMT. “Could not have asked for better care.”
- “We appreciate the fact that firemen check on senior citizens in the summer.”
- “Fire department has improved by leaps and bounds.”
- Several citizens noted how much they appreciate the fire department for announcing fires on social media so the public can know to avoid those areas so the trucks can get through.
- “It is great that a police department that did not have one officer working at night 20 years ago is now a professionally run police force.”
- There were a number of mentions of the effort the police department is doing to address the illegal drugs that come through Bryant on the interstate.
- Additionally, the citizens had high praise for the police department’s school resource officers and the positive impact they have on the schools.
- 89% of the citizens surveyed via the web stated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the sense of safety or security they felt in Bryant.

- Finally, 93% of those who took the web survey were satisfied with the work of the police department.

Public Works

- “The public works department is doing a great job addressing the posters (illegal signs) that have been posted around town.”
- 75% of those surveyed via the web stated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with their waste removal service.
- 74% of those surveyed via the web communicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the water services.
- The attendees of the public works meeting were surveyed on the use of roundabouts in Bryant and everyone present signaled their support.

Quality of Life and Community Image

- There were several positive comments about the small town feel Bryant still has.
- 91% of those surveyed stated that they are either satisfied or very satisfied with living in Bryant. Web
- The high quality of life response is based significantly on the investments Bryant has made in parks and recreation. There were a number of comments regarding the quality of Bryant’s parks and trails. This is supported by the web survey in which there was 81% satisfaction with the parks in Bryant.
- 92% of the citizens who responded to the web based survey communicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with quality of life in Bryant.
- There were several comments regarding the high quality of Bryant’s neighborhoods, additionally 67% of those surveyed via the web had positive comments about the sense of vibrancy in their neighborhoods.
- Several citizens commented on the improved quality of shopping opportunities in Bryant in recent years.
- There were many comments about how wonderful the school is and what a great asset it is to Bryant. 91% of the web survey responses said quality schools were an important quality of life factor.

CITIZEN AREAS OF CONCERN

As noted above the people of Bryant have many reasons to be excited about Bryant. They also have some areas in which those who participated in the Envision Bryant 2030 community discussions have concerns. The concerns were captured and reported similarly to the areas of praise.

Public Works

- Congestion is a major issue of concern, and is likely the number one transportation issue.
- “The left turn lane at Reynolds Rd and Evans Loop makes no sense. There is no way to enforce who has the right of way.”
- 53% of the web survey responses communicated a lack of satisfaction with traffic movement in Bryant.
- “Reynolds Rd is not the place you want to be at rush hour, but it is the place you have to be.”
- There were a couple of comments about too much speeding in neighborhood streets.
- Several citizens commented on the need for a new interstate onramp.
- There were senior citizens who commented that there are no public transportation options in Bryant.
- One person was concerned that the development on the north side of I-30 has contributed to flooding.
- “Street connectivity is a serious problem on the south side of town”.
- 42% of the respondents to the web survey were dissatisfied with the quality of the streets in Bryant.

Quality of Life and Community Images

- Walkability is a major issue. There were several comments regarding the need for sidewalks.
- Bryant lacks a true downtown area.
- There is not enough bike access in Bryant.
- The above ground power lines are unsightly.
- There is a shortage of quality healthcare like a strong hospital presence.
- Not enough focus on park development on the North side of town.
- Bryant does not have enough professional employment opportunities. This forces many citizens to commute. As one town hall attendee put it “we need more corporate jobs.”

Public Safety

- There is concern that the growing number of apartments will contribute to crime.
- There are too many illegal signs being posted on power poles.
- Several citizens were concerned about the “junk” located at the antique store on the service road. This is unsightly and does not represent the community well. This led to a discussion of the need for stricter code enforcement.

WHAT YOUR CITIZENS WANT

Public Works

- New traffic lights at Hwy 5 and Stoneybrook, and Reynolds Rd. and Hill Elementary, and SW 3rd and Boone Rd.
- Widening of Boone Rd., Springhill Rd., and Hilltop Rd.
- Better lighting and sidewalks on Boone Rd. and Mills Park
- The island removed at HWY 5 and Reynolds Rd and replaced with a turn lane or a roundabout.
- An additional overpass at Picket Rd.
- The old Hurricane Bridge moved to Bishop Park pond and used as a fishing pier.
- Connectivity on the Southside of town.
- Quality public transportation options.
- A pedestrian bridge to connect North and South Bryant. The bridge would go over I-30.
- More sidewalks and bike lanes. 55% of those surveyed via the web survey believe bike lanes add to quality of life.
- The ability to easily recycle. This sentiment was shared by 85% of the people who took the online survey.
- According to Atext surveys 54% of the attendees of the public works meeting believe the city should make streets the number one priority for public works dollars. While 23% of the group felt that putting in sidewalks was the best use of public works funds.

Quality of Life

- Specifically, there were several suggestions in the breakout groups about the need for walkable shopping on Hwy 5 and Reynolds Rd.
- More “sit down” restaurants, and open air shopping (including a book store).
- More commerce on the Southside of I-30.
- For the city to address vacant buildings.
- “We need a true downtown area”. This statement is supported by the web survey. 72% of respondents agree that a vibrant town center is important or very important to quality of life.
- A plan for business growth that protects the small businesses in Bryant.
- “We need a movie theatre.”
- Several people in a small group breakout session talked about having a community theater to perform plays.
- Bryant needs to recruit a taxi company.
- “A more walkable Bryant.” This statement is supported by the web survey in which 80% stated that nature trails, walking, and jogging were important quality of life factors.
- More and diverse employment opportunities. While the majority of those who took the web survey were happy with work options in Bryant, 31% said they were dissatisfied.

Parks and Recreation

- A playground at Midland Park.
- “The city should find ways to make playgrounds more accessible for special needs children”.
- Several citizens mentioned a need for safer playground equipment.

- Another recreational facility and a second swimming pool on the North side of town.
- A master trail plan to expand connectivity.
- There was significant talk about having a community garden.
- Several attendees would like to see Mills Park pool revamped.

Public Safety

- Stricter code enforcement of commercial property and buildings. According to the web survey 82% of those surveyed agree that attractive commercial space is important to quality of life.
- According to Atext surveys 42% of the attendees of the public safety meeting believe the city should invest more money in school resource officers. 46% of the group felt that addressing crime should be the primary public safety issue for city government. 38% felt traffic congestion should be the most important safety issue.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Upon conducting the community meetings, reviewing the community feedback and meeting with city leadership we recommend that the following items be considered for action:

Conduct a Formal Needs Assessment

Conducting a community needs assessment is an important part of building a better municipality. This is no different than a developer who surveys the land before building, a general surveying his army before war, or a CEO surveying a company before executing an acquisition. Furthermore, the process should be both formal and ongoing. This needs assessment should include comparative data from other similar communities, a review of economic indicators, as well as a detailed evaluation of the overall strengths and weaknesses of the city. It should assess a wide variety of community life including healthcare, retail tax base, infrastructure and much more. It should include detailed community input obtained through various methods such as telephone polls, and personal interviews. This assessment must be comprehensive and must include all members from all sectors of the community. A well-written needs assessment can be an effective tool when prioritizing your needs. A needs assessment also greatly enhances and prepares Bryant in its efforts to acquire grant funds from outside entities. Additionally, a needs assessment creates an opportunity for citizens to have buy-in, because they were involved in the planning process. It is with these issues in mind that we recommend Bryant conduct a formal needs assessment.

Develop a Community Blueprint

The City of Bryant will greatly benefit from having conducted a formal needs assessment. It is important to take the information gathered from the needs assessment and develop a community blueprint. A community blueprint is the architectural design of the community you desire to build. It articulates the envisioned municipality of the future. This blueprint must be centered on Bryant's own unique identity. This blueprint must be formal and is the document that should clearly articulate the community's vision and the strategic steps necessary to fulfill this vision. The blueprint process must

be shared with the entire community, include participation from all community sectors and steps must be taken to ensure that the community takes ownership of this vision. Your community blueprint will resemble the blueprint of a new home. It casts the vision of the finished project and provides instruction on how to reach it. Like the needs assessment, this is a tremendous benefit to the city's effort in obtaining grant funds and, in addition, fosters continued growth and progress. Finally, it is imperative that both city leadership and the community regularly evaluate this blueprint, as it is a template for continual additions and renovations.

Establish a Formal Strategic Plan

Now that the city understands the broad concepts of the community's vision for Bryant in 2030 the next step is for Bryant to establish a formal strategic plan to make this vision a reality. The strategic planning process should include the mayor, city council members, and key community stakeholders. The plan would lay out exactly where Bryant will be in 2030, the approaches and tactics needed to get there. Lastly the plan would outline timelines and designate the parties responsible for implementing each aspect of the plan.

Conduct Annual Planning Retreats

If the city does not already utilize planning retreats, then we recommend that the Mayor initiate annual or semi-annual planning retreats with both the city directors and department heads in order to share vision, discuss challenges, collaborate on solutions, hear reports and invite guests to address key issues. Some retreats could be beneficial with other key community players focused on broad community needs and not just municipal services. This will allow true dialogue to take place outside of the confines and bustle of the office while also building camaraderie and goodwill. Legacy Consulting is available to facilitate these types of meetings and retreats.

Develop an Aggressive Economic Development Strategy

Bryant needs to create a formal economic development strategy. Currently the Chamber of Commerce, and SCEDC are working on economic development projects in Bryant. However, there needs to be an overarching economic development plan which lays out the roles and responsibilities of the different entities which work to improve Bryant. Bryant must take charge of its economic development concept. Bryant should either hire a full or part time economic developer or contract with an outside firm to provide economic development support. Legacy Consulting can assist the city with the development and implementation of an economic development plan.

Inspire Small Business Creation & Entrepreneurship

The best economic development opportunity for Bryant lies in small businesses. Small businesses are the backbone of most local economies. Scores of these residents across Arkansas dream of being their own entrepreneurs and a handful of them will act on this dream. In fostering a progressive "new economy" reputation it is important that Bryant promote and encourage local small business creation, with a specific focus on developing a strong knowledge based sector of the economy.

Nurturing the entrepreneur spirit in Bryant could help plant a small seed today that bears extraordinary fruit in the next generation. It only takes one successful entrepreneur to transform a location. Bryant

should consider an entrepreneurial program that provides incentives for small business launches in certain sectors or that meet certain criteria. This could be done in conjunction with a university or even a corporate sponsor, foundation or school of business. Bryant should also consider establishing a small business or restaurant incubator.

Aggressively Recruit More Restaurants and Retail Outlets

One of the complaints noted by your citizens is the lack of full service restaurants. Bryant is losing significant sales and sales tax revenue to cities like Little Rock where its citizens are working. Bryant cannot simply wait on retail outlets and restaurants to come on their own. Bryant should do a formal assessment of the retail base, and its needs and market capacity. Upon completing this process we recommend that the city put effort into recruiting retail businesses that will fill economic service gaps, enhance community life and assist in attracting other new projects and residents to Bryant. During this process the economic development team can use the assessment as a marketing tool when they pitch Bryant to retail outlets and restaurants that meet the needs in the assessment.

Continue to Partner with Saline Memorial Hospital

One of the keys to having a strong community is quality medical care. Currently Bryant does not have a hospital. However, Saline Memorial Hospital is a short drive away. Yet and still large companies and manufacturers will not move into an area without quality medical care. It was announced during the town hall meetings that Saline Memorial has a plan to establish a stronger clinic presence in Bryant. The city should do all it can to embrace this effort.

Establish a Return Scholarship

As a way to develop the economy for the long term we recommend the community consider creating a scholarship fund for local students going off to college. The scholarship must have a “return” condition in the terms of the scholarship for all awards. This condition is common in community scholarships for medical school. We recommend that Bryant explore this program for expanding its economy. Students receiving scholarships through the community fund would be required to sign a conditional term that pledges their return to Bryant to work. While this may limit the number of applicants it would allow a larger award for those who do apply and will create an additional return on the investment for years to come. The scholarship could be tied to a variety of specific conditions but the overall principle and goal is clearly to invest in the future of Bryant. It could be operated by a local non-profit or a consortium of non-profits

Continue to Focus on Connectivity

Currently the city leadership is extremely focused on the concept of connectivity. This effort is supported by the community members who participated in the envision Bryant 2030 process. Connectivity, or the lack thereof, was at the center of many of the citizen complaints about Bryant. Traffic flow improvements are critical to this process. So are road design policies that promote activities such as biking and walking. Your citizens envision a Bryant in which cars, pedestrians and bikes share the road.

Create a Walkable and Bikeable Bryant

A key concept of the Mayor's vision is a more walkable Bryant. This concept has strong support in the community. A key question which should be asked regularly when evaluating street designs, parks, apartments, and residential and retail developments is will this make Bryant more walkable. Your citizens want a more walkable community. Therefore everyone at City Hall should be focused on making a more walkable Bryant a reality.

Develop Transportation Alternatives

Currently there are no viable transportation options for those who do not have cars, or cannot or should not drive. Bryant should work to develop some options for these citizens. In the long term Bryant should begin discussions to possibly join CATA, or develop its own public transportation concept in partnership with Benton. In the short term the city should look to recruit a taxi cab company. If there is not enough business in Bryant to support a cab service the city could consider subsidizing the service by entering into a contract with the provider.

Develop a Community Marketing & Public Relations Plan

We recommend the Bryant create a strategic marketing and public relations plan to promote the community. Bryant could, for instance, create a sharp, informative packet that contains information about the city, highlights the city's strengths and appeal, and promotes the city in an attractive way. This type of media can be used to recruit retail businesses, and other unique residential service businesses, tourist, retirees and other new residents. In addition, it will also reinforce a positive image in the minds of your citizens. This new brand and image would be helpful in attracting new families to consider Bryant as a place to settle down.

Consider a marketing campaign for Bryant to let folks learn more about the city and drive them to your fabulous municipal website.

A potential funding source for this project could be local banks or the utility companies the city currently uses. Ultimately you want to develop a marketing plan that fits the city's identity. It should include a specific plan for promoting Bryant as a future hub for knowledge based industries. Legacy Consulting can assist in this project.

Establish a Town Center

Bryant should take the bold step of establishing a true town center. This could be done by revitalizing and expanding the traditional downtown, or by looking to enhance an area that is primed for development such as Mid Town. A truly visionary idea would be for Bryant to approach the owners of Mid Town about acquiring the property. The property could be acquired via bonds, tax increment financing or a mix of a purchase, donation, and land swap with the developers. This would free the city to partner with a developer or group of developers to build an area similar to the Village at Hendrix that would include a new city hall.

OUR SERVICES

The city can engage Legacy Consulting on a per project basis or through an ongoing relationship.

Specifically, Legacy Consulting can provide the following services to Bryant:

- Work with the city to develop a community blueprint.
- Assist the city with grant acquisition requests.
- Help develop and train a staff member in grant writing.
- Review and assess the city's current economic development plans and efforts.
- Develop and implement an overall community development and economic development plan.
- Manage the city's economic development efforts.
- Develop a community marketing and public relations plan.
- Manage the city's public relation efforts.
- Lead community leadership retreats and planning meetings.
- Provide the city with the best practice research regarding the mentioned projects and others of interest.
- Develop all community promotional materials.
- Assist in the pursuit and implementation of all recommendations in this report.
- Create and manage a legislative lobbying initiative.

SUMMARY

Bryant is a wonderful community. The tremendous positive attributes of the city will enable it to continue to grow and prosper. However, the city must take the time to plan for this growth so that the growth happens in a thoughtful and strategic manner. We were honored to play this small role in the story that will be Bryant's future.